

the Moon and, instead, have failed, in many instances, to provide them with the most basic of care.

As of March 16 this year, the Columbia, South Carolina Regional Office of the Veterans Administration had over 21,927 pending cases, with an average wait time of 232 days.

Survivor benefits for veterans' spouses can take between 10 and 18 months to be disbursed, and sometimes even longer, depending on the health status of the beneficiary.

My office is currently assisting a constituent who contacted us because he has had 12 claims pending before the VA, which date all the way back to 2004. Another constituent has had her claims delayed over 18 months because she's been told by the VA that they don't have medical records. Now, this is despite the fact that she's already sent the VA her medical records twice by certified mail.

Unfortunately, claims aren't the only backlog facing the VA. Veterans are also facing delays in seeking medical attention. A lack of doctors and inefficiency in the system have forced some veterans to have to wait months to receive medical care.

Mr. Speaker, to put it simply, the VA isn't clicking and ticking. Despite the best intentions of VA personnel to deliver a high level of service and care to our veterans, too many of our former servicemen and -women are falling through the cracks.

In the Third District of South Carolina, we recently created an advisory committee composed of retired military veterans to provide insight into some of the problems that they're facing today. Their view is not that the law needs to be changed necessarily, but that the spirit of the law is not being followed. Veterans were promised certain benefits and, in too many cases, they are still waiting to receive them.

In addition to the mounting pile of problems regarding veterans services, I'm deeply concerned that veterans will be negatively impacted by the implementation of ObamaCare. The clear goal of the Obama administration's unconditional and unconstitutional health care law is to begin lumping our servicemen and -women into the bureaucracy of ObamaCare. Not only do I think that this breaks a promise made to our veterans, but I'm afraid it will make an already bad situation worse.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we can do better; and for the sake of our living heroes, we must do better. Let us not forget the promises that we've made to our veterans, and let us not just honor our veterans with our words, but let's also honor them with our actions.

Thank you. May God bless our troops in the field, those here at home. May God bless those who have served our country in uniform, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

DISCRIMINATORY VOTER IDENTIFICATION LAWS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to talk about the discriminatory voter ID laws that are undemocratic and simply un-American.

The American Legislative Exchange Council, also known as ALEC, has long been a secretive collaboration between big business and conservative Tea Party Republican politicians serving in this Nation's State and Federal legislatures. ALEC's goal is to advance the special interests of large corporations and the super-rich and wealthy by any means necessary.

Yesterday, I discussed how ALEC has fiendishly and unabashedly produced legislative policy that degrades our air and water quality and wrecks our environment. Last week, I outlined how ALEC has infiltrated our criminal justice system by producing legislation that stimulates higher and higher levels of incarceration, to the benefit and to the surging profits of the private for-profit prison industry.

And if that wasn't enough, with 194 days left until the general election, ALEC has been working hard to suppress the votes of the most vulnerable in our society. ALEC has met with its corporate allies and right-wing State officials behind closed doors to promote legislation to suppress the votes of likely Democratic voters.

By making it more difficult for people to exercise their right to vote, ALEC's model voter ID act grants an electoral advantage to Republicans, while undermining the right of individuals to vote.

In addition, ALEC has worked to make it easier for corporations to participate in the political process. Their Public Safety and Elections Task Force promotes model legislation that would disenfranchise millions of voters, devastate campaign finance reform, and allow for greater corporate influence in elections.

Mr. Speaker, it has injected these corrosive laws into our States, and they have spread like untreated cancer. Bills based on ALEC's model legislation have already been introduced in 34 States and passed in many of those States.

□ 1040

Voter suppression comes in many forms, from new voter ID laws to eliminating Election Day registration to restricting voter registration drives by community groups to reducing the number of days for early voting and limiting the number of days for voter registration. There is no doubt that ALEC is directly tied to the proliferation of these voter ID laws in the States' legislatures.

These policies are not about preventing fraud in the voting process. This legislation is solely about disenfranchising minorities, the elder-

ly, and other at-risk voters, such as the poor, who are unlikely to have the technical kinds of ID that these pieces of legislation demand.

After the spotlight has started to shine on ALEC, they have come out publicly and said, Okay, we're going to get out of the public policy business. They're not going to not write any more model legislation like the Florida "shoot first and ask questions later." They're not going to introduce any more of that type of legislation. They also have announced they're going to shut down their Public Safety and Elections Task Force, which is the committee that produced the voter suppression legislation.

That's a good thing. But the damage has already been done, and we're going to have to remain vigilant about this group, this shadowy group, ALEC, this unholy alliance between Tea Party Republican legislators and big business. We'll have to keep our eyes open. I'll have more to talk about in the coming days.

JONATHAN FRANK DAVIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTMORELAND. Mr. Speaker, I've come to the floor this morning with great sadness but also with a great sense of pride to honor the service of a Georgia hero, Private First Class Jonathan Frank Davis.

On March 29, 2012, Jonathan gave the ultimate sacrifice in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, while supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

Jonathan was the son of Reverend and Mrs. Kerry Davis of Griffin, Georgia. His mother, Tracey, described him as tenderhearted, a tenderness that extended to both his peers and animals. His heart was so large that they now have numerous pets running around their home due to Jonathan not being able to turn away a single stray.

His nurturing and giving nature was one of the things that was loved most about him. As a child, Jonathan always stood up for his classmates who were being bullied, and many of Jonathan's peers remember that he was the first to come to their defense. He was willing to give his shirt off his back to help others and was always concerned about the well-being of everyone around him, especially those less fortunate.

Jonathan was playful and strove to make others happy, either by playing funny pranks on them or with his unforgettable smile that could light up a room. Jonathan attended Griffin High School, where he played soccer, and after graduation, he, like myself, married his high school sweetheart. Her name is Kristen.

Kristen is expecting their first child, and Jonathan talked all the time of how excited he was to become a father. He carried the sonogram of baby Benjamin in his wallet everywhere he went

and couldn't wait to teach their baby boy soccer.

Jonathan's unwavering courage, huge heart, and strong Christian faith are the reasons why he answered his calling to join the Army. He was assigned to the 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was pursuing a medical career after the Army and, having already completed part of his EMT and paramedic training, was on the path to attending medical school.

Jonathan was part of a scout group sweeping an area in Afghanistan and doing what he does best—protecting others—when his group came under enemy fire and he suffered fatal wounds. At only age 20, Jonathan was taken from us much too soon. On April 7, the First Assembly of God Church in Griffin, Georgia, celebrated the life of Jonathan, and he was laid to rest by his close family and friends.

I am proud to stand before you and honor the life of PFC Jonathan Davis and thank him for his dedicated service to our country. His endless generosity and brave spirit are among the many reasons he will be missed so much by all who had the privilege to know him.

Joan and I extend our deepest sympathy to the friends and family of Jonathan, and we will never forget his great sacrifice for our Nation and those that allow us to live free every day.

Jonathan, until we meet again some day, thank you, Brother.

STOP MILITARY RAPE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise again for the 19th time to highlight the epidemic of rape and sexual assault in the military.

By the military's own figures, 19,000 sexual assaults and rapes occur each year, but only 13 percent of the members of the military actually report them.

Last week, I met with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, along with my colleagues, to discuss DOD's new report of data on rape and sexual assault in the military. The report shows a slight increase in reports of rape and assault but a startling decrease in the number of charges brought against reported perpetrators. With a decrease in charges came a significant decrease in prosecutions, in punishments, and in convictions. The numbers, frankly, are very discouraging.

When I left the meeting, I was only pleased about one thing. Secretary Panetta and I agreed that the only way to solve this problem is with an increase in prosecutions. We agree on the results to be achieved, but for right now, we do not agree on the steps to achieve it.

After our meeting, Secretary Panetta announced new initiatives, but DOD's three major proposals will not increase

prosecutions, convictions, or punishments.

Proposal one: elevate cases of rape and sexual assault to higher-ranking officials in the chain of command. Military commanders today told me that many are already having them handled by colonels and captains, yet this does not result in more prosecutions. I believe the cases have to be handled by an impartial office within the military but outside the chain of command.

Proposal number two: establish a special victim's unit in each service of the military. These units have been in place in the Army since 2009. I'm impressed with the training program that is offered to the various members of the investigation and prosecution within the Army. But again, we have not seen an increase in prosecutions, convictions, or punishments as of yet.

Proposal three: create a centralized database of these proceedings and cases. This is a good thing. It's already required in the Department of Defense as a result of the NDAA 2009.

So for all intents and purposes, all of these initiatives are already in place to some extent. The problem is the chain of command, and let me explain.

Claudia Castillo, an Army corporal whose attempts for justice back in 2003 and 2004 were thwarted repeatedly by commanding officers, including a high-ranking lieutenant colonel, all of whom were unmoved by her reports of sexual assault and harassment.

Corporal Castillo was on combat deployment in Iraq when she awoke to a fellow specialist on top of her sexually assaulting her and using force. She was in shock and screamed until he left. She immediately reported the assault to her platoon sergeant, who responded with a lack of surprise or concern. He advised her to wait while he "looked into it." He did not have any advice for how she could get help or go forward.

Corporal Castillo also encountered several incidents of harassment, stalking, and erratic behavior by a much older staff sergeant. She would wake up to find him standing by her bed while she slept. Her reports to command were greeted by ridicule and not taken seriously.

□ 1050

Command discretion empowers a commander to decide if the case goes forward to a court-martial. Even if very high-ranking commanders are in charge of these cases, captains and colonels are not shielded from the conflicts of interest that exist in the chain of command.

Victims should have the benefit of impartiality by objective experts, which is why my bill, H.R. 3435, attempts to do that. We need to overhaul the current military justice system, and I will continue to tell stories like Corporal Castillo's until military justice means justice for all.

DEE COOK—CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND COUNTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. OLSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dee Cook, a distinguished leader in my home community of Fort Bend County, Texas. For over 40 years, Dee has given her time and her energy to help with the children of Fort Bend County, in part through her commitment and support of Child Advocates of Fort Bend County, which fights on behalf of abused and neglected children.

Dee has served as the grant officer of the George Foundation since 1988. The George Foundation contributes to many worthy causes throughout Fort Bend County, and Dee has played a pivotal role in making sure the generosity of the foundation is directed to causes that help our communities the most. However, it is her generous contributions through the George Foundation to Child Advocates of Fort Bend County that bring me to the floor today.

By contributing her time, energy and resources, Dee has enabled Child Advocates to serve over 8,000 children throughout Fort Bend County. Under her leadership, Dee Cook has helped teach the staff and volunteers to be better leaders, more effective program managers, and to achieve the dream of helping the most vulnerable children in our communities in ways we never thought possible 20 years ago. Her contributions are helping children and, in turn, are strengthening our communities and neighborhoods. On their behalf, she has given a voice to those who desperately need one.

Dee's efforts to build philanthropic leaders do not stop with Child Advocates. She has also started an annual 8-month Leadership for Nonprofit Excellence course to teach the rising stars of Fort Bend County the skills they need to harness and grow Fort Bend's strong nonprofit community. Most importantly, she has led a cooperative effort between the George Foundation and the Sugar Land Chamber of Commerce to create Youth in Philanthropy, the YIP Team. The YIP Team is 100 Fort Bend County high school juniors and seniors who spend a school year seeing how volunteerism and philanthropy co-exist to serve our Fort Bend community. At the end of the school year, the YIP Team will put their knowledge to the test by awarding monetary grants to nonprofits—life changing, indeed.

I commend Dee Cook for a lifetime of service to Fort Bend County. I simply want to say to Dee, on behalf of the people of Fort Bend County, thank you. Fort Bend County would not be the county that we all know and love without Dee Cook.

In closing, Dee's love for Fort Bend County will be on display tonight at Constellation Field as Fort Bend's new pro-baseball team, the Sugar Land Skeeters, has its first home game. I join Dee and the people of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County in saying, Go Skeeters.